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# Pentagon Official Backs Renewed Aid for Contras

Ikle Says 'Another Vietnam' Could Develop in  
Nicaragua Unless Congress Restores Funding

By DOYLE McMANUS, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—A top Pentagon official said Wednesday that the Reagan Administration wants to avoid a war with Nicaragua but warned that "another Vietnam" could develop in the area unless Congress restores support for anti-government rebels there.

Under Secretary of Defense Fred C. Ikle indicated that the Administration plans to ask Congress for unrestricted CIA aid to rebels fighting the leftist Sandinista regime. Also, he said, the Administration hopes that last week's confrontation over the possible delivery of Soviet MIG jets to Nicaragua will prompt the Democratic-led House to end its opposition to the covert program.

In an interview, Ikle also said he doubts that the State Department's negotiations with the Sandinistas can succeed because the leading elements in the Managua regime are "Bolsheviks." But, he said, the Administration will continue trying to negotiate anyway.

"It is precisely to counter the risk of U.S. combat forces ever being required in the region that we want to give security assistance (and) economic assistance to the democracies in Central America and that we want to support those who are fighting for democracy in Nicaragua," Ikle said.

"And we think it's a tragic mistake on the part of those who . . . oppose assistance to the so-called *contras* (rebels) to think that they are avoiding another Vietnam," he said. "If there's a road to another Vietnam, it would more likely be the development of Nicaragua more and more toward a militarized state . . . eventually moving toward an offensive action against its neighbors. . . . And if we have to become involved at that stage, it will be more dangerous and more difficult and more costly."

Ikle said the Marxist-led Sandinista regime in Managua will remain "a long-term threat" to neighboring Honduras and Costa Rica unless the CIA-backed rebels are enabled to contain it.

Ikle's forecast that the rebels could block the Sandinistas from interfering elsewhere in Central America appeared to reflect intelligence estimates that, according to other officials, hold that the *contras* could expand quickly beyond their current claimed strength of 12,000 if given more funding.

"We're not saying we expect a Nicaraguan offensive against Honduras or Costa Rica within a few months or even a year," Ikle said. "Far more likely is that the Sandinistas will continue to build up their military strength and try to defeat the domestic opposition. Once they have accomplished that, then they will again interfere among their neighbors."

Nicaraguan leaders have said their military buildup is defensive, launched to counter the U.S.-backed rebels. But Ikle said the Sandinistas have long preached the

spread of revolution to the rest of Central America, and he charged that "their intent and actions" make their arms offensive.

While the State Department has emphasized the need for diplomatic pressure to negotiate a reduction in Nicaragua's weaponry, Ikle said the most important step the United States could take would be to restore CIA funding for the rebels. Congress cut off funding for the covert program in October but set

aside \$14 million that will be available to the CIA next March if both the House and the Senate vote to release it.

However, Democrats in Congress said the Administration's campaign to draw attention to the Sandinistas' arms buildup has not yet changed their minds. Some said the MIG affair—in which intelligence officials first said the warplanes were

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